64 + 5 – what next for Paul McCartney?

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Those of us who are old enough to remember the Beatles, including that song, will also remember the hysteria that went with it, known as Beatlemania. Although their career as a band was actually relatively short – from 1960-70 under that name, their influence has been extraordinary in both music and popular culture. All four wrote songs, but the backbone of the group was the partnership of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. John was regarded as the serious one, and Paul the not-so-serious; many also regarded him as the least talented.

If Lennon hadn't been murdered in December 1980, there is no telling how he would have progressed as a songwriter and more generally as an artist, but although his achievements will stand for all time, he would have had to go some to keep up with his baby-faced one-time partner James Paul McCartney.

The two men shared their writing credits but generally they wrote songs individually, and it doesn't take an *aficionado* to tell who wrote what. *I Am The Walrus* bears Lennon's stamp, while *Yesterday* was written by or predominantly by Macca.

For an idea of how they influenced other artists, check out *Terminal Eyes*, by Al Stewart; it is impossible to hear that and not think of *I Am The Walrus*. It is generally accepted that Macca is if not the most prolific songwriter of all time then the most prolific of the modern era, and if not that, then the most prolific/financially successful/acclaimed/talented of all time. *Yesterday* is the most covered song of all time, so that is at least two individual titles he holds.

After the Beatles it looked like it was all over for him, career wise if not music wise. While it would be impossible to write as many songs as he has without the odd turkey – anyone remember the quite awful frog chorus *We All Stand Together*? – and while his Beatles days set the benchmark, he has produced innumerable songs of similar quality: the 1977 anthem *Mull Of Kintyre*, which he co-wrote with Denny Laine – the first UK release ever to sell two million copies. Before that there was the James Bond film soundtrack *Live And Let Die*; there have also been songs that brought him into conflict with the censor: *Give Ireland Back To The Irish* – a song that has even less melodical merit than political, and simply awful lyrics; *Hi Hi Hi* – which was also banned by the BBC, for an entirely different reason; and *Big Boys Bickering*, his contribution to the fight against environmental despoliation which led to his classic comment to an interviewer "...I'm talking about, erm, the ozone layer and the big hole in it, fifty mile wide hole. I don't think well that's a flipping hole..."

Macca has always been specifically a songwriter; although a multi-instrumentalist, as predominantly a bass player on stage he has never been big on either instrumentals or soloing, so it came as some surprise that he decided to try his hand at composing a ballet. In a BBC interview shortly after its New York debut, he showed typical humility when he said he didn't know much about ballet, but that he wanted to try something he hadn't done before. He ended up writing the story as well, and adopting a generally hands on approach.

He admitted too that he doesn't actually write music, though this admission needs some qualification. He tried with the old lady down the road when he was a kid; tried again when he was 16 with the guy across the road; and tried again aged 21 with a guy from the Guildhall School of Music, again with no luck. Obviously he knows a crochet from a semi-quaver, and he said nothing about either tablature or chords.

His daughter Stella designed the costumes, with a bit of input from Dad. Anyone inclined to put this down to nepotism should think again; Stella is a talented designer in her own right, though obviously a bit of networking helps.

Macca is currently flogging the soundtrack to *Ocean's Kingdom* on his website, in several different formats. The big question is what next, an opera?

First, we should answer the question we began with; if you haven't already guessed the answer, it is simple: that's what he does. It is what defines Sir James Paul McCartney MBE as a human being more than anything else; the desire, indeed the need to create works of artistic merit – or non-merit in the case of the frog chorus.

He may well compose an opera, complete with libretto, perhaps another film soundtrack, or even another ballet, but the very next thing on his agenda is to tie the knot with his American fiancée Nancy Shevell. His previous two marriages ended in widowhood and an acrimonious divorce. Miss Shevell is an heiress, but to dispell any notion of his marrying her for her money, she is quite a looker; Sir Paul is also reputed to be worth a dinar or two, and is also shortly to receive an award for his charity work as much as for his music. As the man himself said: *All You Need Is Love*.

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